MANUAL FOR SCHOOL TEACHERS ON CHILD DEVELOPMENT, MENTAL HEALTH AND DISABILITIES

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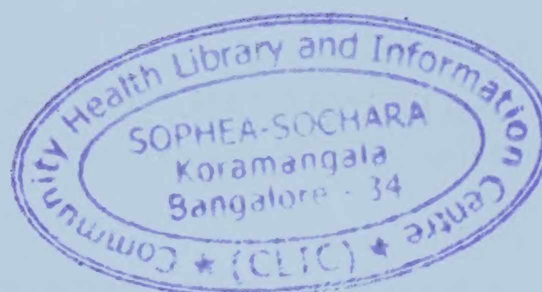
Manual for School Teachers on Child Development, Mental Health and Disabilities - by Malavika Kapur and Uma H. Published by National Council of Rural Institutes (HRD Ministry), New Delhi and National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences (Institute of National Importance), Bengaluru – 29.
ISBN: 81-86418-00-X

Illustrations: Dr. Keshav Kumar

NIMHANS Publication No. 59

First Published: 2006
Second Edition: 2018

Price : Rs. 30/-



Typeset & Printed by

Aditi Enterprises
Bengaluru - 560 023
Ph.: 080-2310 7302
E-mail: aditiprints@gmail.com

Manual for School Teachers on Child Development, Mental Health and Disabilities

Introduction:

Teachers in India, especially in the Government school in the urban and the rural areas are expected to perform several tasks others than teaching. These tasks include:

- Collect statistics of enrolment, attendance, dropouts to be submitted to the Block Education Officers
- Census enumeration
- Election duties
- Collecting text books and uniforms for the children
- Collecting rations and preparing and supplying mid-day meals in the government schools and in the Ashram school
- Preparing and serving breakfast, lunch and dinner
- Supervising the washing, bathing, grooming and dressing of the inmates in the residential facilities
- Feeding all the children on a daily basis puts an enormous burden in terms of time spent on the teachers
- Attending teachers meeting
- Attending teachers' training workshops organized by the education department
- Preparation of teaching aids
- Maintaining Health records of all the children and liaison with the PHC personnel
- Arranging community outreach programme.

Above all, the teachers are supposed to teach, conduct examinations and announce the results. Understandably, attending to the large number of children in the class rooms with very poor infrastructure in the urban areas and in the single teacher multiclass primary schools in the rural areas is not an easy task for a teacher. The schools generally lack:

- Class room (in the rural areas) or play ground space (in the urban areas)
- Furniture
- Stationary and books

- Drinking water
- Toilets
- Electricity
- Games and sports material
- Library and laboratory facilities

THE ONLY RESOURCE WE HAVE IN THE SCHOOLS ARE CHILDREN. In view of the burden of work on the teachers and lack of infrastructure and facilities, there are other major problems. These are present in the children and teachers alike.

- Poor motivation
- Lack of interest
- Lack of commitment

This manual hopes to get around many of the problems by sensitizing the teachers to some of the important aspects of teaching and learning and obstacles faced.

The areas covered are:

- Normal Child Development
- Psychological (mental health) problems which interfere with learning and adjustment
- Disabilities in children and mainstreaming in the class rooms

Normal Child Development

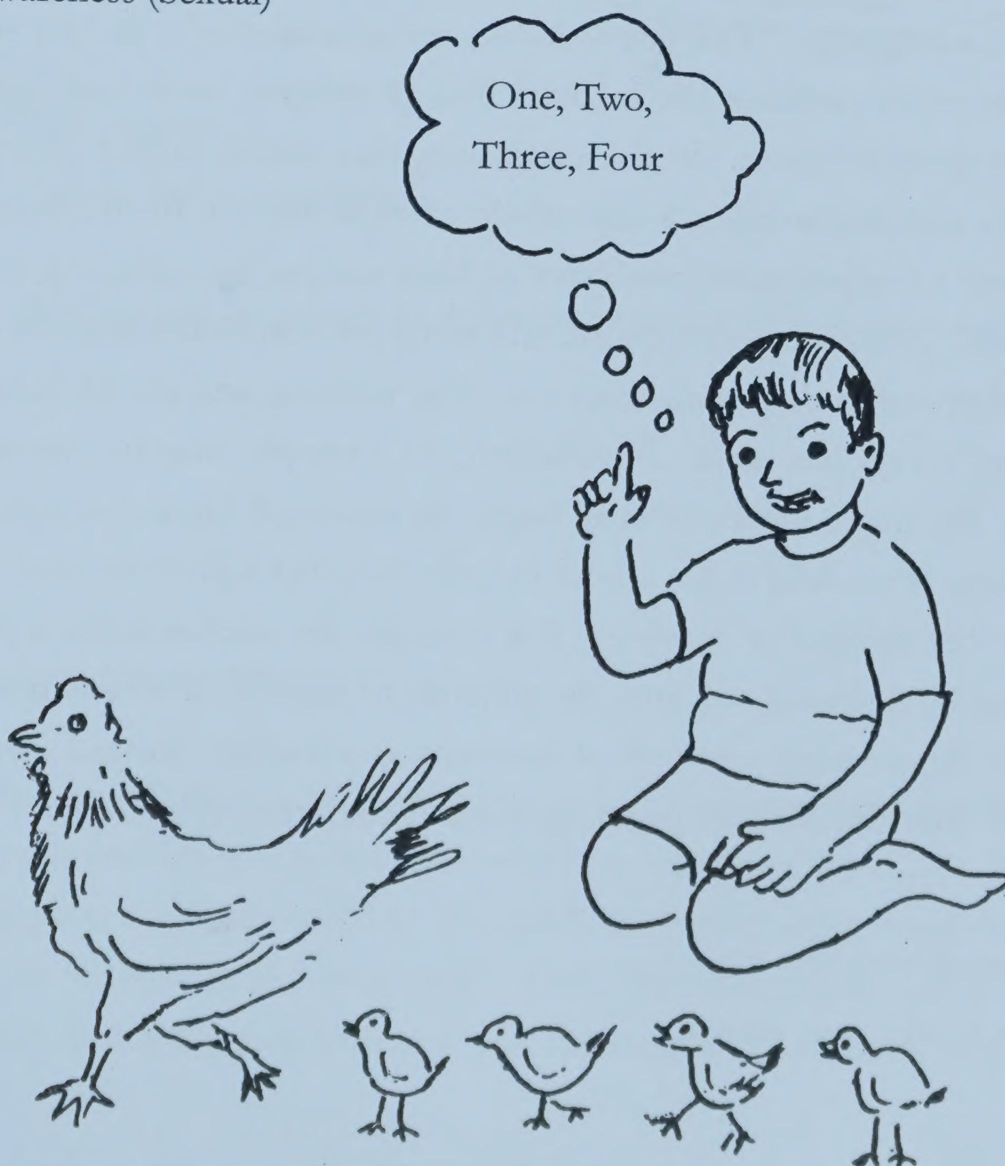
Normal development occurs from infancy through childhood to adolescence in the following areas:

- Motor
- Intellectual
- Language
- Emotional
- Social
- Moral
- Sexual

All the above areas are of concern to the children, parents and teachers. In the earlier decades

of understanding of the child's mind, it was believed that the children are born with mind like "clean slates" and that they learn everything from us. The current understanding based on the research in child development demonstrates that babies are born with enormous capacities of the brain and the mind to acquire skills soon after birth. We should not underestimate the baby's ability to learn about oneself and others. Even a week old baby can track objects with eyes, distinguish between the mother's face and a mask, even imitate some movements! They get bored with sameness in what they hear or see and shift their attention to something new. They come equipped to:

- Acquire motor skills, (fine motor and gross motor)
- Understand the world (attention, observation, meaning, intelligence, including problem solving, analysis and synthesis and abstraction)
- Learn language and produce speech (Language)
- Feel emotions (Emotional)
- Relate to people (Social)
- Develop conscience (Moral)
- Sexual awareness (Sexual)



Of course, all these develop at a faster rate if the right kind of environment is provided. The classic epic story of Abhimanyu tells us that he learnt the secret of "Chakravyuha" in his mother's womb. Most babies are born equipped to start learning immediately. It is worthwhile to remember that children can create their own world of learning observing and picking cues from the environment. They observe carefully and imitate quickly whatever interests them. The development in all the seven areas mentioned above take place very rapidly in infancy, childhood and adolescence then slows down.

Childhood is the best time for learning. If the statement supported by the research is true, **why do our children fail to learn?** Or is that they fail to learn in school, otherwise they learn a lot from their environment, from observing, listening to stories and so on? Do the teachers try to find out what the children already know?

Most teachers believe that children can only learn when they are taught by their teachers. Often the children are compared to a lump of clay or an empty vessel which the teacher shape or fills up. Teachers believes that they are the 'reservoir of knowledge' and the children are clean slates! Unfortunately this attitude and belief is quite common amongst teachers and other adults. It is reflected in the statement "The untouchables are unteachable". In this section on child development we hope to persuade the teachers that all children come well equipped to learn about the world if given a chance. If given a chance, they can be skilled, creative, imaginative and communicative and demonstrate a new world of experience to the teachers. Children also come equipped with a temperament (swabhava or basic nature) like being shy, irritable, friendly, happy, active or dull. Some are very sensitive and some are not. Teachers often fail to note that the children are different in their temperaments. The teaching and punishment methods used by the teachers are always the same. Punishment, for example, may be viewed differently by different children. But praise makes them all happy (as in adults!) How does one create the right kind of environment for a child in the school to make him/her a good learner? The teacher has to re-examine his/her method of teaching. For example, the teacher draws a picture of a 'jug' or a 'fruit' on the black board and asks the children to copy it. There is nothing creative in it. You are simply reproducing your lack of creativity as a teacher. Instead why don't you try a different method? Give the children paper, pencil and colours (crayons/colour pencils) and tell the children to:

- Draw whatever you like
- Could be a flower, tree, person....



- School, village, market...
- Yourself, friends, family members,...

In a class of 20 children you would get 20 different drawings. These may be different in

- Colour
- Content
- Size
- Beauty
- Expression of feelings/thoughts

Here it is a product of child's own skills, thoughts, imagination, creativity and feelings. While the traditional approach permits you to find out only how well the child copies, the new approach permits you to explore the inner world of the child. You must understand that these drawings may not always be realistic, skilful or artistic. But it does not matter. It is a product of the child's inner world. It will improve with time and experience. In addition, you will note that the

child enjoys this activity and does not get bored. It will take a great deal of **inner discipline for a teacher not to tell** what the child should do. This applies equally to play, speech and any creative activity. The approach of discovering the joys of learning by the child himself or herself is not permitted in the standard teaching practices. For example, we teach by the method of instruction, which encourages imitation and rote learning (learning by heart). Children are made to copy elaborate scripts or alphabets endlessly for hours together. How can a child enjoy it? The task needs good gross motor and fine motor skill which a young child is yet to acquire. Copying the letters in a repetitive manner is indeed truly an 'IMPOSITION'.

Instead if you examine a letter of any script, you will note different shapes are incorporated in it. For example, circles, line, dots, triangles, strokes etc. A child can easily use these lines in a drawing drawn freely. For example, a sunrise behind the mountains with a tree and river in the front have all the strokes and lines to develop the child's gross motor and fine motor skills. Each drawing increases the skills of holding a crayon, a pencil or a brush. The child will joyfully learn the basic skills before starting to actually write.

Teachers often complain that children do not speak or answer questions. Sometimes the child may even have a mother tongue different from the medium of instruction. When the teacher expects an exact answer, the children are afraid that they do not know it. But when they play a word game lke "Anthakshari" they relax and are able to communicate – for example one can start with

- Names of objects in the environment/picture
- Names of fruits, vegetables, animals
- Names of objects starting with a particular letter.

One can then go on to encourage the children to telling stories, to enact stories, to sing and dance. Children can and will do these activities on their own, without being taught by the teacher. You will be surprised by their creativity if you give them a chance to experiment and be creative. We have discovered through our research that children can attain all the academic skills through art, craft, play, storytelling etc. Conventional teaching contributes very little to the overall development of the Child while play way and child friendly methods promotes overall development. Though all the teachers claim that they are familiar with 'joyful learning' methods in theory, they have no idea how it works – as they have not really witnessed it. If you could actually use these methods you will be surprised by creativity and learning skills of the children from disadvantaged population



such as slum children, scheduled caste and tribal children. According to the theories and practices of child development in the West and our own research with children in the government schools in urban and rural India, **we have no doubt that child friendly methods – using child as the resource can work wonders with our children in enhancing their overall development.**

Common Psychological Problems in Children

How do you identify?

All children face some problems or the other as they grow up. These problems are to be considered a disorder – which needs to be attended to, only when

- It has gone on **too long**
- It is **too severe and cannot be tolerated**
- It is **distressing to the child or those around or both**
- It **affects the school performance**

What are the causes?

The problems may arise because of the **child** or the problems in the **child's environment**.

The child characteristics that may contribute to psychological problems are:

- Child's temperament (too timid, aggressive, passive, restless, etc.) that he/she is born with
- Level of intelligence
- Sensory deficits (poor hearing, vision)
- Motor deficits (weakness of hands/legs or poor motor coordination)
- Mild or severe delays in development (motor and language)
- Chronic physical illnesses

The environmental contributors are:

Family:
- Parents who often fight
- Anxious, ambitious, over protective
- Indifferent or neglecting
- Excessively strict or punishing
- Sibling rivalry or jealousy

Social:
- financial (poverty) and social problems (social class or caste or religion related)
- Neighbours of different social strata
- Gang of friends who are antisocial
- Children who do not mix socially

School:
- Problems may arise out of the poor school system, the teachers and the other children
- Teachers who like the parents may be neglecting, punishing or indifferent
- Teachers who do not teach and blame the infrastructure, children or due to personal problems

Peers:
- Bully weaker and younger children or tease the girls / boys
- Align with teachers and punish the children
- Exclude children because they are of lower caste, poorer, girls or have disabilities.

Causes are mostly many and not single

For example, a child from a poor background being neglected at home, with no friends in the school or neighbourhood because of her shy nature may not do well in school, though she has

an average intelligence. The teacher may consider her stupid and make fun of her. There are **many** causes to her poor school performance; that is within the child, at home and in the school. Another illustration is that of a poor home where the father drinks and beats the mother. The mother works as a coolie and supports the family. The family has three children. The elder boy is aggressive in school, fights a lot with other and does not study; the second boy has friends in school, studies well and is very popular among his classmates. The third one is a girl who is very quiet, worrying, anxious and preoccupied with the problems at home. She is not doing well in studies. All of them share the heredity and home and school environments.

Yet they are so different why?

- The elder boy has inherited a difficult temperament and has learnt to imitate his father's behaviour
- The youngest girl has inherited her mother's passivity and behaves in a similar fashion
- The second boy has got good or resilient temperament, which has protected him from being influenced by a psychologically unhealthy home environment.

Common Psychological Problems of Childhood

These can be described as follows:

- Disorders in children may be seen as externally directed or internally directed problems. That is it may be disturbing to the child or to the others or both.
- **Externalising or conduct disorder.** (Behaviours which are disturbing to others)

In the very young children these may be seen as

- Over activity
- Impulsivity
- Poor attention and distractability

In the older child it may be manifested in :

- Stubbornness
- Temper tantrums
- Fighting
- Bulling
- Lying



- Stealing
- Destructive Tendencies
- Disruptive behaviour
- Missing school deliberately
- **Internalizing or Emotion disorder** (Problems which are distressing to the child)
- Shyness
- Fearfulness
- Anxiety
- Extreme sensitivity
- Not having friends
- Quiet
- Withdrawn / sad
- School refusal
- Cries easily
- **Physical symptoms related to stress** (when upset may have physical symptom)
- Stomach pain
- Headache
- Vomiting
- Asthma (wheezing attacks)
- Other body symptoms without physical basis
- **Developmental delays**
- Delayed or poor speech and language development
- Stammering and stuttering or articulation difficulties

It is important to observe whether the child understands the spoken language. Children differ in acquiring speech and language skills. Some attain them by one year. Another may speak clearly in the 5th year. Poor speech or pronunciation is common in the children below the age of six.

Stammering is due to faulty learning and can be treated. When any of the above persists, they should be referred to a speech pathologist.

- **Wetting and soiling in the school or at home**

It is common for children to urinate frequently when:

- They are young
- Frightened
- Have weaker bladder control (runs in the family)

Teachers should not punish them but allow them to go to the toilet. One should not make fun or punish when a child wets or soils himself or herself. It is not an illness, with some training the child will outgrow it.

- **Poor school performance**

Poor school performance may be due to

- poor school system and faulty teaching practices
- child having difficulties with the medium of instruction, having a different mother tongue
- sensori motor handicaps
- low intelligence
- poor attention
- home demands leading to irregular attendance
- psychological problems described earlier
- specific learning difficulties

Specific learning difficulties need a special mention. When the child has any of the above problems, and appears to have average intelligence, the child has only difficulties in **reading, writing and mathematics alone or in combination.** These children require remedial teaching, which involves preparing lessons of classes at a lower level at least 3 years below and building up the basic skills. These children are provided exemptions and concessions during X standard by the Government of Karnataka.

What to Do?

With the Child:

- Listen to the child without interrupting
- Establish a relationship when the child feels free to relate to you by being friendly
- Take interest in the child's activities and feelings
- Find out what problems the child faces at home and school
- Encourage him/her to work on the possible causes for the problems
- Work on the possible and simple ways to solve the problems
- Focus on the Child's special talents and achievements as it enhances the child's self esteem.

In the school

If the problem lies within the school, teacher, other children or the studies (teachers, head master or other children)

- Negotiate with the others on behalf of the child
- Find out if the problem can be solved by talking to the parents

Epilepsy

Epilepsy or 'fits' occurs in the children of all ages. A typical fits may produce unconsciousness and convulsions. The fits occur always in the same manner. These are due to abnormal electrical discharges in the brain. Consequently causes poor memory and difficulty in learning new material if untreated. If the child has more than two episodes of fits he/she has to be kept on anti epileptic drugs for five years without fail. Then the child can be fit free and lead a normal life. Fits are not contagious, as it is commonly believed to be. If a child has a fit in your presence please keep the child in a safe and airy place and do not do anything like restraining the child or stuffing the mouth with hard objects. The fits last only for a very short time. Take the child to a neurologist or the PHC.

Class Room Management of Difficult Behaviours

- If the child is over active with poor attention, provide a quiet place and give simple tasks to improve attention like stringing beads or sorting grains by colour, shape or size. Praise each time he/she completes the task.
- If the behaviour is destructive, explain that the behaviour is unacceptable to the teachers as well as other children. If punishment is unavoidable: discuss first with the child and the other children and ask them advice as how this bad behaviour could be controlled. This always brings out suggestions and confirming to good behaviour by the children.

  Ignore and not pay attention to the disruptive behaviour

  'Time out' – send the child to a place where he does not get attention, a corner or a room. But it should be a minute per year of the age of the child. Not too long and not in dangerous places.
- Do not punish, but praise generously
- Group work with children can be held to discuss common problems encountered by them at school, home and within oneself

- Problem solving exercises. For example examining alternative solutions, discussing the advantages and disadvantages of each, to choose one and trying it out.

  Problems of adolescence can be very difficult and needs to be handled differently. Some serious problems such as mental illness, depression and suicidal threats, addictions and sexually transmitted diseases may be the cause for concern in this group. However, masturbation, homosexuality and heterosexual interests may not be viewed as abnormal. These may be talked about as normal manifestations. Concerns of the adolescents may be taken up in separate groups for the boys and girls. We have used life skills education, role play and open and non-threatening discussion of sensitive topics in the rural high schools. Sexuality should be discussed in the context of human feelings, relationships, values and societal expectations. Protected sex should receive attention.

Multiple Disabilities in Children and Mainstreaming

Children with disabilities could belong to any of the following categories:

- Intellectual retardation
- Visual impairment
- Hearing impairment
- Orthopedic impairment

The disabled children are issued identity cards if the disability is more than 50%. The ID cards enable them to obtain pension, travel concession, aids and appliances and job reservations later. It is good if the teachers are familiar with the procedure of obtaining the ID card if there are children with disabilities in the classroom.

The Government ruling is there which stipulates that the disabled should be mainstreamed in the schools. This is especially so, in the rural areas, where the disabled do not have the opportunity to attend the special schools.

How can Teachers Help the Disabled to Integrate in the Normal Schools?

- The teachers and the children should understand the problems faced by the disabled in the school setting. They could play the games where they can put themselves in the situation of not being able to see, hear or walk and understand what are difficulties – in learning in the class rooms or playing with the other children.

- Make the teachers and other children appreciate the other skills the disabled children develop to survive.
- Cultivate empathy by talking to the disabled children about their lives
- Include them in all the activities as far as possible in the school and help them
- Have a class room discussion on what it is to be different through stories, role-play and dramas. For example, as the child given below:
  — girl child
  — child from scheduled caste
  — child from scheduled tribe
  — child with disability

Give a chance to the rest of the children to understand how discrimination of any sort hurts. However, it must be remembered that the teachers and the children can be unkind and cruel, unknowing or deliberately. These issues need to be resolved through open discussion with the sense of justice and compassion.

Acknowledgements

We thank Prof. M. Gourie-Devi, former Director and B.N Gangadhar, present Director of the National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences for their whole hearted support towards the projects and publication of the manuals. We thank Ms. Geetha A., Ms. Chandra Kumari, Mr. Ranga Nair, Mr. Venkatesh, Mr. Siddanaik and all the teachers and children who made the experience a rewarding one for us.

We thank Dr. Keshav Kumar for the sketches & Ms Chitra N for the help rendered in proof reading. We thank the NCRI, Ministry of Human Resource Development, New Delhi and NIMHANS, Bengaluru for all the support.

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Ability Overcomes Disability

Disability is not easy to live with, but those with strong will power can accept it as a challenge and achieve extraordinary things with their life. World Disabled Day, on the 3rd of every December, is a day on which creates awareness among the public about disability and instill confidence, enthusiasm and courage in the Disabled.

People like Alfred Nobel and Helen Keller, to whom physical handicaps were no longer a hurdle, are still remembered for their services rendered to society. It is a proven fact that if the right opportunities are provided to the Disabled, results par excellence can be expected.

Education, Employment and Training, Rehabilitation and Social Security are some of the areas in which the Government of Karnataka has created a congenial atmosphere, provided opportunities and safeguarded the welfare of the Disabled in the state. The various programmes implemented by the Government for the all round development of the Disabled are as follows:

- A monthly maintenance allowance of Rs. 500/- to Rs. 1000/- provided to disabled persons
- Concessional bus passes.
- Vacancies reserved in all Government Departments and undertakings.
- NHFDC loans for self-employment.
- Schools opened for the disabled, Free education upto 18 years of age
- Monthly and Merit Scholarships
- Commissioner appointed to protect rights and ensure equal opportunities to the disabled.
- Adhara scheme extends loan assistance for starting various self-employment ventures.
- Telephone booths provided free of cost.
- Aids and appliances like wheel-chairs, tricycles, hearing aids, Braille watches, etc. provided free of cost.
- Insurance scheme for parents of mentally retarded persons.
- Nirmaya Scheme for reimbursement of medical expenses.

The Parliament has passed a Central Act in 1995 which has been in force since 1996 to ensure equal opportunities, protection of rights and full participation of persons with disabilities. The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 has broadened the scope of welfare for differently abled people by extending additional benefits and including 21 types of disabilities compared to the seven categories defined in the previous Act (1995).



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